The Imperfect Promulgation of the Gospel, consider'd.

A SERMON

Preach'd in the

Church of St. *Mary le Bow*,

January 7. 1^{699}_{700}.

Being an *Appendix* to the Lectures of the last Year, appointed by the Honourable

ROBERT BOYLE, Esq;

By *SAMUEL BRADFORD*, Rector of the said Church, and Chaplain in Ordinary to His Majesty.

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Printed for *Tho. Parkhurst*, at the *Bible* and *Three Crowns* in *Cheapside* near *Mercers-Chapel*. 1700.

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JOHN 3. 16, 17.

God ſo loved the World, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoſoever believeth in him, ſhould not periſh; but have everlaſting Life. For God ſent not his Son into the World to condemn the World; but that the World through him might be ſaved.

THeſe are the Words of our Bleſſed Saviour, who, as he beſt underſtood the Extent of that Love, which moved the Almighty Father to ſend him into the World, ſo he hath here expreſs'd it in the fulleſt and moſt comprehenſive Terms. The Love of God, not to any particular Nation, but to *the World* in general, was the Motive upon which he gave his Son. The Deſign of our Lord's coming was to ſave not any particular Race of Men, but the whole Race of Mankind, *the World* in general, without Exception. There is indeed a Condition required of thoſe who would partake of this Salvation, *viz.* that all, to whom the Goſpel of Chriſt is publiſh'd, ſhould believe in him; no other Limitation is ſet, but

this very reaſonable one, *That whoſoever believeth in him, ſhould not periſh; but have everlaſting Life.* This is indeed a Truth ſo plainly aſſerted in diverſe other Texts; 'tis moreover ſo agreeable to the Deſign and the Tenor of the Goſpel throughout; 'tis finally ſo ſuitable to the Apprehenſions which we naturally have of the infinite Goodneſs of God, that I ſhall not inſiſt upon the Proof of it; the Purpoſe of this Diſcourſe being rather to obviate an Objection, which will eaſily ariſe in the Minds even of ſerious Men, ſuch as are not diſpos'd to cavil, but are us'd to contemplate both the Works and the Word of God, with Sobriety and Reverence, for whoſe Satisfaction I thought it worth the while to take this Matter into particular Conſideration.

The Objection is this; If the love of God expreſſed in giving his only begotten Son, be ſo Great, and ſo Univerſal, as it is here repreſented; whence comes it to paſs, that ſo ſmall a part of Mankind ſeem to have receiv'd Benefit from the Chriſtian Revelation? The Caſe of all Men ſeems to have been equally deplorable, and compaſſionable: If then the Love of God, teſtified by our Redeemer, were extended to all Men, if the coming of the Son of God into the World, were deſigned and fitted for the Benefit of all; is it not very ſtrange, that four thouſand Years ſhould be run out before he came; and that ſince his appearing ſo ſmall a Part of the World in compariſon ſhould be bleſt with the Knowledge of what he hath done for them, or of what he offereth to them?

Now

Now for the easing our Minds under this Difficulty, I shall proceed gradually, laying down several Propositions, which will mutually support each other, and which being impartially consider'd and lay'd together, may suffice to silence this Objection, if not fully satisfie those that make it. And,

First, If we were able to give no tolerable Account of this Matter, yet we ought not to be surprized or stumbled at it, because of the infinite distance between God and us.

They are very reasonable Questions which *Job*'s Friend put to him, when he in the bitterness of his Soul complain'd of his grievous Afflictions, and was at a loss with Respect to the Justice of God's Dealings with him. *Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto Perfection? It is as high as Heaven; What canst thou do? deeper than Hell; what canst thou know? The Measure thereof is longer than the Earth, and broader than the Sea.* Job. 11 7, 8, 9. *Great is our Lord*, saith the Psalmist, *and* not only *of great Power*; but *his Understanding* also *is infinite.* Psalm 147. 5. And shall we finite Creatures think then to comprehend his Ways? Shall we reckon our selves competent Judges of his Actions? St. *Paul* thought otherwise, when contemplating a Difficulty of Providence, of the same kind with that before us, he cries out, *O the Depth of the Riches, both of the Wisdom and Knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his Judgments, and his Ways past finding out! For who* Rom. 11. 33, 34.

hath known the Mind of the Lord; or who hath been his Counſellor? It muſt be own'd, that we are not able to account for the Methods of Divine Providence in many other Inſtances; and whoſoever is not abandon'd of all Modeſty, muſt readily acknowledge, that it is reaſonable that it ſhould be ſo. For we have not the entire Scheme of Providence in our Heads at once; we cannot ſee from the beginning to the end of God's Ways; we know not what are the Deſigns, and what will be the Iſſues of his Counſels; and therefore ought to ſuſpend our Judgments, till the Concluſion and winding up of Things. Which will appear to be more eſpecially fit in this Caſe, if we conſider,

Secondly, That we our ſelves may diſcern ſeveral Particulars, in which we are manifeſtly ignorant, which yet ought to be known by us, if we would pretend fully to account for the Difficulty before us. I might give many Inſtances; but will content my ſelf with two plain Ones.

He that would give a full Account of this Matter, muſt be acquainted with two Particulars, which no mortal Man can certainly know, without an eſpecial Revelation from God; namely, Whether thoſe to whom the Goſpel is not publiſhed during this Life, ſhall ever hear of it in any future State: And again, What Meaſures God will at the laſt Day take with thoſe, to whom the Goſpel was not publiſh'd.

No

No Man certainly knows, whether thoſe who never heard of the Goſpel in this Life, may not in ſome future State have it publiſh'd to them.

It has been ſuppoſed by ſome, that thoſe Pagans, who ſhall have approv'd themſelves Honeſt and Sincere in this their State of Tryal, may, when their Souls ſhall be ſeparated from their Bodies, have the Goſpel reveal'd to them in their ſeparate State, in order to their becoming capable of the Rewards of Chriſtians, at the laſt Day.

A late Learned and Ingenious Writer has eſſayed to make it probable, from a Prophetical Paragraph in the Apocalypſe, that thoſe, who ſhall have liv'd and dy'd without hearing of the Goſpel in this preſent State, ſhall, after our Saviour's return, before the final Period of this World, be rais'd again, and have the Goſpel preach'd to them, and thereby be put into a new State of Tryal, in order to their Salvation or Damnation, as they ſhall then acquit themſelves. Mr. *Stayne*, of Salvation by *Chriſt* alone.

Now though I will neither affirm nor deny either of theſe Opinions to be true, nor ſo much as ſay, that they are probable; yet this I will venture to ſay, That I believe it very difficult for any Man to prove that they cannot be True; and yet if either of them ſhould prove True, the Difficulty before us would be perfectly ſolv'd. And thus much we may ſafely infer from theſe Conjectures, that if contemplative Men can think of ſome ſuch poſſible Ways for the ſolving this Difficulty, there may be many more Ways of doing it known to the Divine

Divine Underſtanding, and which will be clear and eaſie to our Underſtandings alſo, when it ſhall pleaſe God to reveal any of them to us. And I confeſs, I would ſuppoſe any thing that is plauſible, nay, any thing that is poſſible, much rather than entertain one hard thought of the Maker and the Redeemer of Mankind.

But yet farther, no Man certainly knows what Meaſures God will take at the laſt day with thoſe, who ſhall have liv'd and dyed unacquainted with the Goſpel. We are certainly inform'd, how God will deal with thoſe to whom the Goſpel is publiſh'd; *He that believeth, ſhall be ſaved: And he*
Mar. 16. 16. *that believes not ſhall be damned.* But this *believing*, or *not believing* plainly ſuppoſes the Goſpel preach'd to them, it being impoſſible, as St. *Paul* ſuggeſts, that *they ſhould believe in him,*
Rom. 10. 14 *of whom they have not heard*; and as impoſſible that *they ſhould hear, without a Preacher.* And how God will deal with thoſe who were under this diſadvantage, the Goſpel hath not ſo expreſly told us, it's Declarations being to them, to whom it is publiſh'd. But becauſe this will fall under conſideration in another Place, I will add no more here, but proceed to my next Propoſition, *viz.*

Thirdly, We may our ſelves diſcern very much of the Reaſonableneſs and fitneſs of that Method, which Providence hath taken, both as to the time of our Saviour's coming into the World, and the way and manner in which he order'd his Goſpel to be publiſh'd.

Almighty God, having made Men reaſonable Creatures, hath all along dealt with them as ſuch, in

in a way very ſuitable to their Nature, and their preſent Condition in this Life. His Providence wiſely and gently orders and over-rules the Affairs of Mankind, with as little Violence as is poſſible, drawing and leading Men to Repentance and Amendment, rather than driving and compelling them. Accordingly ever ſince the Fall, it hath pleas'd God to uſe ſuch Methods as might reaſonably promote, tho' not neceſſitate their Recovery.

Thus in the firſt Ages of the World, beſides the Impreſſions which God had left of himſelf upon the Minds of Men in their very make, and what they might farther have learned of him by contemplating his Works, there was a plain and certain Tradition both of his firſt forming Man, of the Law he gave to our firſt Parents, of their Fall, and of the kind Intimations of the Divine Compaſſion towards them after their Fall; there was, I ſay, a plain and certain Tradition of all theſe and many more Particulars, eaſily deriv'd down from *Adam* to *Noah*; *Adam* being able fully to inform *Methuſelah*, and *Methuſelah* to inform *Noah* of all that each of them knew. And this one would in reaſon judge had been a ſufficient means of inſtructing and reclaiming the ſinful Race of *Adam*. And accordingly there were ſome in each Generation, who were recover'd from their fallen Eſtate to that degree, as to become acceptable to God themſelves, and Inſtructors and Examples to others. Thus we read of *Enoch*, that *he walked with God*, that is, *pleaſed him* by a pious and virtuous Courſe Gen. 5. 24.

of

of Life, and not only by his Converſation reproved, but, as St. *Jude* tells us, *propheſyed* alſo againſt *the ungodly Sinners* of that Age, and was indeed ſo much too good for a bad World, that *God took him* to himſelf, as an Encouragement to the few Good, and a Warning to the many Bad Men of thoſe times. *Noah* was ſuch another, of whom it is ſaid, that *he was a juſt Man, and perfect* (or *upright*) *in his Generations*, and that *he walked with God*; as likewiſe that he was *a Preacher of Righteouſneſs* to *the World of the Ungodly*. And beſides theſe external Means of Inſtruction and Reformation, 'tis intimated, that *God's Spirit* alſo was all that while *ſtriving with Men*.

Jude, 14, 15.

Gen. 6. 9.

2 Pet. 2. 5.

Gen. 6. 3.

Indeed when none of all theſe Means would prevail, but the Caſe of Mankind was become deplorable and utterly deſperate, when *God ſaw that the Wickedneſs of Man was great in the Earth, and that every Imagination of the Thoughts of his Heart was only evil*, and that *continually*; then, and not till then, he determined to interpoſe miraculouſly, by *deſtroying Man from the Face of the Earth*, reſerving only *Noah* and his Family, as the Seed of a new and better World.

Gen. 6. 5.

Verſe 7.

When by this Means there was a new Beginning of Mankind, when *Noah*, being himſelf a good Man, and extraordinarily preſerv'd and inſtructed by God, was able to convey to his Off-ſpring a certain Tradition, both of what he had deriv'd from *Adam*, before the Flood, and of what he had learn'd of God ſince, and eſpecially to give them an Account of that Stupendous

Stupendous Judgment whereby the old World was deſtroy'd, one would have thought again, that this ſhould have effectually ſecur'd his Race in the Practice of Piety and Virtue for the future.

But when his Poſterity alſo ſoon degenerated, ſo that in the Space of ſomewhat more than four hundred Years, even Idolatry began to infect the pureſt Branch deriv'd from him, God then by a ſpecial Providence again interpos'd, chuſing *Abraham*, calling him forth from his Country and his Kindred, inſtructing and guiding him, and as a Reward of his Eminent Faith and Piety, appointing his Poſterity to be his peculiar People, whom he preſerv'd and govern'd in a miraculous Manner from one Generation to another, thereby to awaken other Nations, if they would obſerve the wonderful Works of Providence towards that People; or at leaſt to preſerve one Nation from the General Contagion.

Amongſt them God raiſed up a Great Lawgiver, with a Succeſſion of Prophets, diſcovering ſtill by degrees more of his Kind Intentions towards them and all the World, and promiſing in due time to raiſe up of the Seed of *Abraham*, One who ſhould be the great Deliverer and Saviour of Mankind.

When the fulneſs of the time was come, as St. *Paul* emphatically expreſſes it, *God ſent forth* this great Perſon into the World, dignified with the Title of his *only begotten Son*. By which Expreſſion, *The fulneſs of the time*, (as Gal. 4. 4.

hath been often obſerv'd by thoſe who have conſider'd this Point) is not only to be underſtood, that it was the Time to which all the Predictions relating to the *Meſſiah* pointed; but moreover, that it was the fitteſt Seaſon, that ever yet had been, for the Appearance of ſuch a Perſon. It was then, when all other proper means, having been tryed, had prov'd ineffectual. When the Meſſengers formerly ſent from God, could not prevail, *laſt of all he ſent his Son.* It was then, when by the diſpoſal of Divine Providence the World was beſt prepar'd for the receiving him. It was, when he was become *the Deſire* and *Expectation of all Nations*, as not only the Scriptures, but ſome of the Roman Writers themſelves do aſſure us, which *Expectation* was probably deriv'd partly from the *Jews* who were diſpers'd, and eſpecially from the Divine Oracles, which about three hundred Years before our Lord appear'd, had been by Order of *Ptolemy Philadelphus* tranſlated into the Greek Language, and thereby the Predictions concerning the Meſſiah divulged. Finally, it was then, when firſt by the *Grecian*, and afterward more fully by the *Roman* Empire, a conſiderable part of the World was not only conquer'd, but civiliz'd alſo, and an intercourſe between many Nations eſtabliſh'd, and thereby a Way made for the more eaſie Publication of the Goſpel, from *Judea*, throughout the then known Regions of the Earth. And certainly This was the fitteſt Seaſon, that ever yet had been for the Appearance of the Saviour of Mankind.

Matth. 21. 37.

Haggai 2. 7.

Suetonius. Tacitus.

If

If we farther proceed to conſider, in what manner our Lord appointed his Goſpel to be publiſhed, and what Courſe the firſt Preachers of it took to that purpoſe, we ſhall ſtill perceive more of the Reaſonableneſs and Fitneſs of the Method wich Providence hath uſed in this Caſe.

When our Lord commiſſion'd his Apoſtles, it was *to make Diſciples out of all Nations,* and *to go into all the World and preach the Goſpel to every Creature.* And the Doctrine which they were to preach, was admirably ſuited to this End. It was a Doctrine Rational and Pure, fit to be underſtood and receiv'd by every Nation under Heaven, containing nothing Singular, nothing Narrow, nothing that might ſeparate or diſtinguiſh one Nation or Family from another; but equally adapted to the Condition of all Mankind. Matth. 28. 19. Mark 16. 15.

There was indeed an occaſion here for a miraculous Interpoſition of Providence, and accordingly it pleas'd God to interpoſe. For becauſe thoſe, whom our Lord ſent to preach his Goſpel, were unable to ſpeak the Languages of the ſeveral Nations, to which they were ſent, and conſidering farther the ſtrong Prejudices that the World lay under againſt this (to them) new Religion, God therefore beſtow'd upon them the Gift of ſpeaking whatſoever Languages ſhould be neceſſary for propagating the Chriſtian Doctrine, and alſo a power of working other Miracles, to excite and move their Auditors, firſt to gain their Attention, and then to convince

their Judgments; which Powers continued in the Christian Church, as long as they were necessary, that is till the GOSPEL was considerably spread abroad, and able to support and propagate it self by more Natural Means.

Such indeed was the Fidelity and Industry of the Apostles and their immediate Successors, and so conformable were their Lives to the excellent Doctrine which they preach'd, that Christianity had incredible Success in those early times, insomuch that in about three hundred Years, it prevail'd against all the false Religions, which had been so long receiv'd, and became the establish'd Religion of the *Roman* Empire.

This was the Course which Providence took for the dispersion of the Knowledge of our Saviour and his Religion throughout the World, which as it was the most Natural and most reasonable Means to that End, so I can hardly doubt, but that if the Christians of the Ages following had continu'd to recommend their Profession by the Exemplariness of their Lives, and had retain'd that Zeal which their Predecessors shewed for propagating it in the World, it had long before this been the establish'd Religion of Mankind. So that if the Gospel be not publish'd to the World universally, it proceeds not from any defect in the Provision which God hath made to that purpose; but from the Fault of those to whom God had committed so great a Trust. Had Christian Princes been as zealous to promote the Religion

gion of our Lord, as to extend their *E*mpire; (I mean not by Violence, but in Methods ſuitable to the Nature of this Religion;) had Chriſtian Subjects been as eager to advance the Knowledge of our Maker and Redeemer in Foreign Parts, as they have been to ſettle Trade and Commerce there; had all of us, who call our ſelves Chriſtians, *ſhewed forth* in Chriſtian Tempers and Practices, *the Virtues of Him that called us*, and the Excellency of the Religion he hath taught us; there would probably have been no Occaſion for enquiring, as we now do, why the Goſpel of our Lord is confin'd within ſo narrow Bounds.

Fourthly, As I have juſt now mention'd the open and evident Cauſe's, of the Goſpel being not farther propagated, ſo there may be another more ſecret and hidden Reaſon, of God's permitting ſome Parts of the *E*arth to remain ignorant of the Chriſtian Revelation. 'Tis what we cannot be ſure of, in all the Inſtances of this kind: But 'tis what ſeems highly probable as to ſome of them, and what ſome Paſſages in Scripture ſeem to hint, *viz.* That God hath in Juſtice permitted this, either becauſe, when the Goſpel was firſt preach'd to ſome Nations, they utterly rejected it; or becauſe he knew, what God only can know, that ſome Nations were ſo wholly indiſpos'd to receive it, that the Preaching of it to them would have had no other effect, but to have aggravated their Condemnation.

We

We read that St. *Paul* and *Silas*, with *Timothy*, Acts 16. 6, 7, 9, 10. *were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the Word in* Asia; and again, *When they essayed to go into* Bithynia, *the Spirit suffered them not*; and presently after, that *a Man of* Macedonia *appear'd to* Paul *in a Vision, and prayed him, saying, Come over into* Macedonia, *and help us*; upon which they immediately bent their Course that Way, *assuredly gathering, that the Lord had call'd them to preach the Gospel unto them.* Now although there might be, and probably were other Reasons, in these particular Instances, why they were diverted from *Asia*, and sent into *Macedonia* at that time; yet hence it plainly appears, that the Divine Providence did particularly direct the first Preachers of the Gospel, where to publish it; and this might sometimes be the Reason of such Direction, that in some Places they were better dispos'd to receive it, than in others; which may be confirm'd by another Passage, a little after in the same History. It is said that at *Corinth*, the Lord exciting St. *Paul* by another Vision to preach the Gospel there, assign'd this as one Reason, *For I have much People in this City*, that is, many who would, and accordingly did readily embrace the Christian Doctrine, and accordingly the Apostle *continued there a Year and six Months, teaching the Word of God among them.* And who knows, but that this may be the hidden Cause, why God permits some Nations to sit in darkness; because, when they had an Oportunity of having the Gospel promulg'd amongst them, they obstinately rejected it; or it may be, because they have so universally

Acts 18. 10, 11.

ſally and groſly ſinn'd againſt the Light of Nature, deſpis'd the Dictates of Conſcience, and degenerated into ſuch vile and deviliſh Diſpoſitions, that if the Goſpel were preach'd amongſt them, it would only ſerve to aggravate their Condemnation?

This is very agreeable to the Directions, which our Lord gave his Apoſtles, when he ſent them abroad to preach; *Into whatſoever City or Town ye ſhall enter, enquire, Who in it is worthy.* And again, *Whoſoever ſhall not receive you, nor hear your Words, when ye depart out of that Houſe or City, ſhake off the Duſt of your Feet,* namely, *as a Teſtimony againſt them,* that they had the offer of the Goſpel, but were ſo wicked as to reject it. Tis conſonant alſo to our Saviour's Declaration, that *Whoſoever hath, to him ſhall be given, and he ſhall have abundance: And from him that hath not, ſhall be taken away, even that which he hath*; which is the Reaſon he aſſigns, *Why he ſpake to the multitude in Parables,* whilſt he reveal'd to his Diſciples *the Myſteries of the Kingdom of Heaven*, adding, *Therefore ſpeak I to them in Parables; becauſe they ſeeing, ſee not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they underſtand,* &c.

Matth. 10. 11, 14. Mark 6. 11. Matth. 13. 12. Verſe 10, 11. Verſe 13.

'Tis certain, that this may be aſſign'd as a Reaſon, why the Light of the Goſpel is departed from, or at leaſt very much obſcured in diverſe Places, where it once ſhone very bright, namely, that it was not duly improv'd by thoſe whom it enlightned. We know how our Lord threaten'd the Church of *Epheſus*, for *leaving her firſt Love. Remember therefore*, ſaith he, *from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the firſt Works*

Rev. 2. 4, 5.

Works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy Candlestick out of his Place, except thou repent, which Threatning has been long since remarkably fulfill'd, in the prevailing of *Mahometanism* in those Parts; and if GOD hath not dealt as severely with others, who may have deserv'd it as much, his *Goodness* should not make them presume; but *lead them to Repentance.*

Fifthly, I have yet farther this weighty Consideration to offer in this Case, *viz.* That the Efficacy of our Saviour's Undertaking for Men, doth certainly extend much farther than the actual Knowledge of him doth.

This must be suppos'd as to Infants, at least such as are enter'd into the Christian Covenant by Baptism, that they are capable of Salvation by Jesus Christ, without actually knowing and believing in him. This must again be allow'd, as to all the good Patriarchs, and other pious Men amongst the Jews, who although they did believe and hope in God, for the fulfilling of the great Promise of a *Messiah* to come, yet did not see that Promise fulfill'd, nor could actually know and believe in him, as we do.

Such in truth was the Goodness of God to Mankind, as to testifie his Compassion towards them immediately after the Fall, by the Promise then made of *the Woman's Seed,* that is, of *the Messiah,* which Promise as it was renew'd upon all occasions, so as an Effect of his Interposition, were confer'd all the Benefits which Mankind re-

receiv'd from God, after the sin of our first Parents. It was upon his account that they were respited from present Death; and that their Posterity have been blest with all those Favours, Temporal and Spiritual, which they have enjoy'd from that time to this; insomuch that the Efficacy of our Lord's Undertaking is to bear date from the first Promise of it; nay, from the Purpose and Intention of God before his actual Promise. But more particularly yet;

Sixthly, The Holy Scriptures do every where represent our Saviour, as having made Expiation for the sins of all Mankind, without Exception, as well those who were born before his appearing, as since; and those who live in the remotest and darkest Corners of the Earth, as those to whom the Gospel is publish'd.

He is the Propitiation for our sins, saith St. *John*; *and not for ours only; but also for the sins of the whole World.* 1 John 2. 2. *There is*, saith St. *Paul*, *one Mediator between God and Men, who gave himself a Ransom for all, to be testified in due time.* 1 Tim. 2. 5, 6. And the same Apostle in a set Discourse, expressly makes the Benefit of Christ's Death, in the design of it, to extend as far as the sin of *Adam* had done. The Author to the *Hebrews* affirms, that our Saviour took our Nature upon him, *that he by the Grace of God might taste death for every Man.* Heb. 2. 9. And the same inspir'd Writer is very express in declaring, that the Sacrifice of the Death of Christ did in its Merit and Virtue reach backward to the begining of the World, as well as forward to the end of it. *Not*, says he, *that he should offer himself often, as the* Heb. 9. 25, 26.

Rom. 5. 15, &c.

the High Priest entereth into the Holy Place every Year with the Blood of others; for then must he often have suffered since the Foundation of the World: but now once in the end of the World hath he appear'd, to put away sin, by the Sacrifice of himself; whereby is plainly intimated, that this one Sacrifice had its Effect from *the foundation of the World.* If it be ask'd, wherein the effect of this Appears so extensive, I answer by my next Proposition, *viz.*

Seventhly, That by means hereof God was so far reconcil'd to Men, as to give Place for Repentance, and to accept of it, wheresoever it was sincere.

In the first Covenant made with *Adam,* there was no Allowance made of Repentance after Transgression: but upon the Interposition of our Redeemer, and in Virtue of that Expiation, which he was to make, when he should come into the World, sinners were allowed and encouraged to repent and turn to God, in hopes of obtaining his Favor. The very respiting our first Parents from the execution of the Sentence denounced, was an intimation that Repentance would be acceptable to God; the Promise made soon after the Fall was a Confirmation of the same thing. God's commanding and encouraging Sacrifices still farther encouraged Repentance. The Question which God put to *Cain, If thou dost well, shalt thou not be accepted?* plainly signified his pleasure in this Case. *The Goodness of God* continually exercis'd towards all Mankind in so many Instances, naturally tended *to lead them to Repentance.* All along throughout the Old Testament, both in *Moses* and *the Pro-*

Gen. 4. 7.

Rom. 2. 4.

Prophets, Repentance is inculcated and encouraged. That peremptory Declaration and Oath of God, tho' made to *the Houſe of* Iſrael, yet is in very general Terms, and ſuch as ſeem to concern all Mankind; *As I live, ſaith the Lord God, I have no pleaſure in the Death of the Wicked; but that the Wicked turn from his way and live*; with much more to the ſame purpoſe, in the following Verſes. In the Prophet *Jonah*, we find that *Nineveh*, a Pagan City, was ſpar'd upon the Humiliation of its Inhabitants. When our bleſſed Saviour came to declare the Will of God more fully, it was in theſe Terms, *That Repentance and Remiſſion of ſins ſhould be preach'd in his Name, amongſt all Nations, beginning at* Jeruſalem. And altho' this Doctrine is preached only to thoſe, to whom the Oracles of God are publiſh'd; yet we cannot from thence fairly conclude, that if in any other part of the World there be found any true Penitents, their Repentance ſhall not be accepted of God, becauſe they were not expreſly told ſo beforehand. On the contrary, as the Conſideration of the Divine Goodneſs will diſpoſe us to hope the beſt, ſo there are diverſe Hints in the Oracles of God themſelves, which may incline us to take the favourable ſide in this Controverſie. St. *Peter* ſeems to have done ſo, when upon obſerving how God had accepted the Prayers and the Alms of *Cornelius*, he own'd himſelf convinc'd of a Miſtake which he lay under before, crying out, *Of a truth I perceive, that God is no Reſpecter of Perſons; but in every Nation, he that feareth God and worketh Righteouſneſs is accepted with him.*

Ezek. 33. 11.

Luke 24. 47.

Acts 10. 34, 35.

'Tis true, ſometimes Faith is made the Condition of Acceptance with God, as well as Repentance, particularly in our Text, it is expreſly made the Condition of Salvation: but then if by Faith be to be underſtood an expreſs believing in Jeſus Chriſt, it muſt be reſtrain'd to them to whom he is preach'd. For, as I obſerv'd before, the Patriarchs, and other good Men of the Jewiſh Nation, were accepted upon their Faith, believing the Promiſes of God, and obeying his Commands, before the coming of our Lord and when they had very obſcure Notions concerning him. And the Apoſtle to the *Hebrews*, in his excellent Diſcourſe of Faith, even that Faith which is acceptable to God,
Heb. 11. 6. defines it in general, *a believing that God is, and that he is a Rewarder of them that diligently ſeek him.* Which indeed will include believing in God, as *a Rewarder of them that ſeek him through Jeſus Chriſt*, where the Goſpel is publiſh'd: But it ſeems evidently to imply alſo, that God will accept ſuch a degree of Faith in him, as is ſuitable to the Revelation he hath made of himſelf, be it more or leſs. What elſe can we think of ſuch a Man as *Job* for Inſtance, concerning whom it is
Job. 1. 1. ſaid, that *he was perfect and upright, one that feared God and eſchewed Evil?* Who yet was not of that Family, which God had choſen to be his peculiar People, and to bleſs with his more particular Revelations; but an *Arabian*. What ſhall we again think of *Abimelech*, a *Philiſtian* King, in whom was likewiſe found *the Fear of God*, to that degree, that upon his Admonition, he read-
Gen. 20. 6, &c. dily *eſchewed* that *Evil* which he was before in danger of, though unwittingly, and *in the integrity of his*

his Heart? And altho' I dare not profeſs my ſelf aſſur'd of the State of *Socrates*, or *Epictetus*; yet I cannot but be ſtrongly inclin'd to hope, that the Expiation of our Redeemer may have render'd their Repentance and Obedience in a good degree acceptable to God. And God only knows, how many more penitent and ſincere Souls may be found, in the dark Corners of the Earth. It may be, for ought we know, in this Caſe, as in that of *Elijah*, who imagin'd himſelf left alone, when God knew of no leſs than *ſeven thouſand in* Iſrael, *who had not bowed the Knee to* Baal. But yet farther, 1 Kings 19. 14, 18.

Eighthly, Another Effect of the Expiation made by our Redeemer, may have been, for ought any Man can know to the contrary, the ſecret Operation and Influence of the Divine Spirit, enlightning and moving the Minds of Men, in all parts of the World.

'Tis acknowledg'd, that no Man can either repent, or believe in God, or obey him acceptably, without the Aſſiſtance of the good Spirit; 'tis confeſs'd alſo that this Aſſiſtance is expreſly promis'd only through Jeſus Chriſt: but I ſhould be very loth to affirm, that it was never imparted to any, who were not actually inſtructed in the Chriſtian Doctrine. There can be no doubt, with Reſpect to the Patriarchs, who were the Friends and Favorites of God, and by their Faith and Piety demonſtrated, that they were enlighten'd and mov'd by his Spirit. The Law of *Moſes* did not expreſly promiſe the Aſſiſtance of the Spirit; and yet there is no Queſtion, but that

that pious and good Men among the Jews did partake of it. And ſhall we confine it to them only? No! I would rather hope that *Job* and *Abimelech* before mention'd, nay, that *Socrates* and *Epictetus* alſo, in their Meaſure, partook of the ſame; the Fruits of that Divine Spirit methinks very evidently appear in many of their Expreſſions and Actions. Diverſe Pagans, as I obſerved in a former Lecture, have been ſenſible of this Truth, and openly avow'd that the Inſpiration of God was neceſſary to Virtue, and accordingly believ'd that ſuch as were truly Virtuous amongſt themſelves, were ſo by the aſſiſtance of the Divine Spirit. And it ſeems highly worthy of God, to believe thus; at leaſt not to believe otherwiſe.

And indeed if we reflect upon the Notion, which was current amongſt the beſt and moſt ancient Chriſtian Writers, and which the Holy Scriptures ſeem to have led them into, concerning the Diſpenſation of God towards Mankind, by our Redeemer, we ſhall the more eaſily be diſpos'd to be of this Judgment. For they look'd upon our Saviour, as not only deſigning, but beginning his Tranſactions for the good of Men, from the time of their firſt Creation; and for the Recovery of Sinners, from the time of their Fall. They believ'd that diverſe of the Appearances, mention'd in the Old Teſtament, were really of the Son of God, in Angelical Form, anticipating thereby and prefiguring his Appearance at laſt in Humane Nature. They believed that it was He, who conducted the *Iſraelites* from *Egypt* into *Canaan*; that it was He, who

who was in the Tabernacle, and in the Temple, in the midſt of the Cloud, towards whom therefore the Jews paid their ſolemn Adorations. And for the like Reaſon they believ'd, that it was He, who inſpir'd all the great and good Men, that were eminent for Piety and Virtue, either among the Jews, or in any other Nations. In a word, they underſtood St *John* to mean as much, where he ſays, *That was the true Light, which enlighteneth every Man that cometh into the World*, not only by imparting the Powers of Underſtanding and Reaſon to them in their firſt Formation; but alſo by farther opening their Underſtandings, and improving their Minds, as they ſhould become capable, by the ſecret Suggeſtions and Motions of his Spirit. So that, although he did not appear in Humane Form, till four thouſand Years were elaps'd; yet he had not neglected Mankind all that ſpace of time; nor doth at preſent neglect thoſe who have not heard of his Incarnation; but *was* and *is in the World*, even in thoſe Parts of it, where *they know him not*, uſing thoſe Methods, which to his Divine Wiſdom ſeem meet, for the training up well-diſpos'd Minds, which do not reſiſt the Grace which he offers to them. There is but one Propoſition more that I have to add, and it is this, *viz.*

John 1. 9.

Verſe 10.

Ninthly,

Ninthly, That at the great Day of Judgment, all Men ſhall be accountable to our Lord, with due Regard had to their Reſpective Advantages or Diſadvantages in this their State of Tryal.

Our Lord hath expreſly declar'd, that *unto whomſoever much is given, of him ſhall be much requir'd*; and that Men ſhall be called to an account for the Talents committed to them, by their Lord, whether more or fewer, in ſo much that he that had but *one*, ſhall be accountable for that *one* only. St. *Paul* in a ſet Diſcourſe ſeems to have determin'd this Matter peremptorily, as between *Jew* and *Gentile*; ſo by parity of Reaſon, between *Chriſtian* and *Gentile* alſo. He calls the Day of Judgment, *the Day of the Revelation of the righteous Judgment of God, who will render to every Man according to his Deeds, to the Jew firſt, and alſo to the Gentile*; adding, *For there is no reſpect of Perſons with God: For as many as have ſinned without Law, ſhall alſo periſh without Law, and as many as have ſinned in the Law; ſhall be judged by the Law*: And again, *When the Gentiles, which have not the Law, do by Nature the things contained in the Law, theſe having not the Law, are a Law unto themſelves.*

Luke 12. 48. Matth. 25. 14. *&c.*

Rom. 2. 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14.

'Tis very true, that the Salvation of the Goſpel is by the Goſpel promis'd only to thoſe who believe and obey it, and conſequently to whom it is preach'd; as Damnation is therein expreſly threatened to thoſe who reject it; and we are not ſo plainly told what kind and what degrees of Rewards and Puniſhments God will diſpenſe to others: but we are in the general aſſu-

red,

red, that the Recompences of that Day ſhall be all juſt, and carry a Reſpect to *the Deeds done in the Body*, bearing ſome Proportion to the different Circumſtances and Conditions of Men. And therefore St. *Paul* a little before his Diſcourſe juſt now cited, lets us know, that the Condemnation of wicked *Gentiles* would be very juſt, by Reaſon of their having deſpis'd the Dictates of Nature and Reaſon, becauſe *they withheld the Truth in Unrighteouſneſs*; for, as he argues, *That which may be known of God, is manifeſt in them*; *for God hath ſhewed it unto them.* God hath, as he there farther proves, render'd himſelf ſo conſpicuous to all Men, as the Maker and Governour of the World, that thoſe who are ignorant of him muſt be *without* Excuſe. He is ſo near to *every one of us*, as the ſame Apoſtle elſewhere diſcourſes, ſince *in him we live, and move and have our Being*, that we may even *feel after him, and find him*; and he hath *written* his *Law* in ſuch viſible Characters in all *our Hearts*, ſhewing us the plain Difference between moral Good and Evil, in the chief Inſtances thereof, cauſing our *Conſciences* to *bear witneſs*, and our *Thoughts* to *accuſe* or *excuſe*, as we demean our ſelves, that he may juſtly call us to an Account for ſuch our Demeanor.

Rom. 1. 18, 19.

verſe 20.

Acts 17. 27, 28.

Rom. 2. 15.

So that the whole Matter at laſt comes to this Iſſue. Some Men have, by hearing the Goſpel preach'd to them, far greater Advantages, than others; but then they are accountable likewiſe for thoſe ſpecial Advantages: whereas ſuch, as not through their own default, but by the meer Providence of God, want thoſe Advantages, ſhall

be anſwerable for no more, than what they have been entruſted with. God hath done more for thoſe, than for theſe; and 'tis but fit, that he ſhould freely diſpoſe of his own Gifts, *after the Counſel of his own Will:* but if he doth what is abundantly ſufficient for all, and will expect no more, than in proportion to what he gives, there remains no juſt Ground of complaint to any.

And thus I have done with what I thought fit to be offer'd on this difficult Argument; and I hope, if what I have propos'd be conſider'd without Prejudice, it may ſuffice to make us humbly acquieſce in the Diſpenſation of God by Jeſus Chriſt, acknowledging that the Deſign of our Lord's coming was *to ſave Sinners* in general; and confeſſing to the glory of the Almighty Father, that his *love* was manifeſted to *the whole Race of Mankind*, by *ſending his only begotten Son into the World* for our Salvation.

I ſhall conclude all with two practical Inferences, *viz.*

Firſt, We may infer from hence the great Obligation which lies upon us, to whom the Goſpel is publiſh'd, to comply with the Terms of it, particularly *that* mention'd in the Text, as comprehenſive of all others, *believing in Jeſus Chriſt.* Whatever gracious Allowances God in his infinite Goodneſs may make to others, we cannot hope for *Salvation* upon any other Conditions, than a grateful Acknowledgment of this infinite Love of God, a firm and ſtedfaſt Faith in his only begotten Son, together with an hearty Reſignation of our ſelves to his

his Conduct. As by theſe our Priviledges we are *exalted to Heaven*; ſo upon our abuſe of them, we ſhall be *caſt down* to the loweſt depth of *Hell*. *This* (as our Saviour declared, a little after the Text) *is the Condemnation, that light is come into the World; but Men loved darkneſs rather than light, becauſe their deeds were evil.* Verſe 19.

Secondly, If the Love of God toward Mankind be ſo extenſive, it becomes us then, inſtead of caviling at the Divine Providence on account of the Goſpel's not being publiſh'd to all the World, to do our part towards the Propagation of it

The Princes and great Men of the Earth may do very much to this purpoſe, as I have already obſerv'd. Others alſo, eſpecially thoſe Bodies and Societies of Men, which have Commerce with the Gentile World, might contrive Methods for propagating their Religion together with their Trade. And all of us might contribute to this generous Deſign, by our earneſt Prayers to God for the enlarging of his Son's Kingdom, and that it would pleaſe him to excite the Spirits of thoſe who have Power and Intereſt to advance this Noble Work.

This the pious Founder of theſe Lectures had a great ſenſe of, when by a Clauſe in his Will, he obliged thoſe who ſhould preach them, "to be aſſiſting "to all Companys, and en- "couraging them in any Un- "dertaking, for propagating "the Chriſtian Religion in "foreign Parts.

In fine, we may all contribute towards it, by living Chriſtian Lives; and if we have neither Power nor Intereſt to promote the *Profeſſion* of our Religion in Foreign Parts, we may at leaſt promote the *Practiſe* of it at Home, by our

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Examples. Nothing in [illegible] would so powerfully recommend our Holy Religion to Mankind, in order both to the Belief and Practice of it, as to have it fairly represented by the Tempers and Lives of its Professors. *May Almighty God revive the Spirit of Primitive Christianity, in those who take upon them the Christian Name; and may their light shine so clearly and brightly, as to enlighten the darkest and remotest Regions of the Earth, to the Glory of God and our Redeemer.* Amen.

FINIS.

ERRATA.

Sermon I. P. 5. l. 2. read, *into the World.* p. 23. l. 8. r, *misled.* Ser. III. p. 9. l. 29. r. μίσω. p. 20. l. 7. r. *Mediator.* p. 23. l. 10. r. *he.* Ser. VII. p. 3. l. 14. r. *so it.* p. 15. l. 33. blot out, *his.* p. 26. l. 28. r. *valuable.* Ser. VIII. p. 10. l. 18. r. *their, ibid.* l. 27. r. *Men.* p. 12. l. 22. r. *Evangelist.* p. 14. l. 25. r. *be.* p. 20. l. 18. r. *blessing then.* Ser. XI. p. 6. l. 15. r. *not believing.* p. 13. l. 16. r. *Cause. ibid.* r. *Gospel's.*